



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE WORK OF ISAIAH.

By WILLIAM R. HARPER,
The University of Chicago.

Isaiah as a writer and speaker;—as a statesman;—as a teacher of morality;—as a preacher of divine truth.

THE greatest character in Israelitish history from David to the exile was the prophet Isaiah. What was his special work and what were the particular ideas which he made effort to promulgate? The following outline, necessarily greatly condensed, is suggested as a help for the appreciation of his work.

I. ISAIAH AS WRITER AND SPEAKER.

1. *His greatest efforts.*—The most brilliant work of Isaiah as writer and speaker will be found in chap. 2, in which he describes the day of Jehovah against that which is lofty; chap. 5: 1–6, in which is presented the parable of the vineyard; chap. 5: 26–30, in which he describes the approach of the Assyrian army; chap. 30, in which he pictures the coming down of the embassy of the Egyptian political party to Egypt, and chap. 10: 5—12: 6 (in case the verses of chap. 12 are to be accepted as authentic) in which he presents a picture of the future relations between Assyria and Israel. An examination of these and other passages shows that there is no writer in Israelitish literature who presents a greater number of magnificent utterances, unless it be the writer of the Book of Job. In ability to describe situations, to seize upon the living pictures of a scene, the features which are most striking, Isaiah is unsurpassed. One sees even the smallest details standing out clear and distinct. For variety of matter and variety of style, for beauty and power of expression, perhaps no single passage, either elsewhere in Isaiah or in the entire range of Hebrew prophetic literature, is superior to the Assyrian prophecy in chaps. 10–12.

2. *His skill in adjusting himself to circumstances.*—Let us recall the sudden change of temper and the abandonment of his original purpose in order to rebuke the sins and foibles of his day in the transition of 2:1–3 to 2:4 ff.; the detail with which he describes the ornaments and wearing apparel of the women, 3:16 ff.; his sudden turning in the midst of his address to the women in his audience, 32:9; the use made of the invasion of Tiglathpileser, 8:21, 22—9:1; the message to Ethiopia, 18; and the introduction of the priests' complaint because of his interference, 28:9, 10. It is evident that our prophet is ready for any and every emergency. He does not prepare his sermon and deliver it without regard to circumstances. He is ready, if occasion demands, to stop short in the very midst of his discourse and take up a theme suggested by the situation before his eyes. He changes from the calm, peaceful description of that ideal future to the rapid, agitated, and even terrible picture of the present. In the midst of an address to the men he will turn to the women on the outskirts of the audience; now it is Egypt against whom he thunders forth the message of Jehovah, and now it is Ethiopia. When all is light to the people, he pictures darkness; and when the darkness of his prediction actually comes, his thought goes forward to a distant time when the people will again walk in light.

3. *His skill in handling his material.*—In this connection there is to be noted (1) the fact that each and every prophecy is an artistic whole; (2) the wealth of figurative language which enables him to bring his meaning home to the hearts of the people, for example, the picture of the ruler selected because he has clothing (3:6), the little child leading the wild beasts (11:6–8), the disappointing dream (29:8), the lesson drawn for the politicians of his time from the field of husbandry (28:24–29), (3) his use of symbols—the names of children, Shear-jashub, Mahershalalhashbaz, and likewise Immanuel, his walking barefoot and naked (20:2), etc. It will be seen that he is confined to no single method. He determines that those who hear shall understand. He chooses the method of presenting his material which will be most striking, and one cannot doubt that in every case his meaning was clear.

4. *His use of figurative language.*—One need only study the more important images of one or more addresses to appreciate the strength of Isaiah in this particular. A few of the more striking figures in chapters 2-4 are the following: (1) the mountain of the Lord's house, (2) the beating of the swords into plowshares, (3) the day against the cedars and oaks, (4) men going into caverns and rocks, (5) Israel ruled over by babes, (6) women walking with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, (7) seven women taking hold of one man, (8) the branch of Jehovah, (9) the census-roll of the new Jerusalem, (10) the purging of the filth, (11) the smoke and fire and canopy in and over Jerusalem, (12) a pavilion for the shade from heat and for the refuge from storm and rain. Examine 10:5-12:6, omitting all but the more prominent figures, and we have: (1) Assyria represented as a rod of punishment, (2) Assyria gathering the riches of the nations like the gathering of eggs, (3) none in her presence moving the wing, opening the mouth, or chirping, (4) the axe boasting itself against the hewer, (5) the saw magnifying itself against the one who handled it, (6) the staff shaking the man who carried it, (7) the remnant of the trees of the Assyrian forest so few that a child can count them, (8) the yoke destroyed because of the fatness, (9) the lopping off of the boughs, (10) the shoot from the stalk of Jesse, (11) righteousness the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins, (12) the animals in peace with each other and with man, (13) a highway for the return of the remnant, (14) the drawing of water from the wells of salvation.

5. *His fondness for contrast.*—Compare the picture of future glory (2:1-5) with that of present shame (2:5 ff.), the picture of desolation, poverty, and reproach (3:25-4:1) with the picture of plenty, peace, and protection (4:2-6), the description of the good vineyard and the bad grapes which it produced (5:1-6); the contrast between the darkness of his times and the glorious light of the Messianic future (9:1, 2); the infant who is to be born, and whose name shall be Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace (9:6), in contrast with the mighty warrior Tiglathpileser; the oak of Jesse's stump which shall sprout

(11:1) in contrast with the Assyrian stump of cedar which shall never spring up. In fact, nothing is so marked as Isaiah's fondness for contrast, and in many cases the exercise of this passion, if so we may call it, produces an effect not simply forcible and significant but indeed startling.

6. *His literary style.*—One may decide for himself the application to Isaiah's style of the following adjectives. Space does not permit the citation of examples. His style is accurate and complete, chaste and severe, stately and measured, lofty and majestic, highly figurative, imaginative, natural and direct, original, terse, pointed, characterized by versatility, and, above all, original.

7. *His power as an orator.*—The man who could adjust himself so successfully to a situation, who could handle his material with such effect, whose language was enriched by such wealth of figurative expression, who could depict so vividly either the light, or the darkness, the glorious future, or the wretched present; the man who could for so long a period—under four kings—maintain his influence upon the nation; who, standing alone against his king and fellow countrymen could win the victory over them; who, in spite of the deepest despondency on the part of king and people, could alone withstand the Assyrian hosts, although at the very gates of the city, this man must have been a wonderful orator. His productions were not written to be read; but prepared for the platform. This platform was the busy thoroughfare, the steps of the temple, the corner of the street; and we can without difficulty picture to ourselves the prophet, a young man (when his heart was stirred by the luxury and profligacy of his times), a middle-aged man (when he describes the coming doom of Samaria), an old man, yet still full of fire and vigor in those last great days when Sennacherib's host threatened to wipe off Israel from the face of the earth,—we can picture to ourselves the prophet, all through his life, engaged in face-to-face struggle with the people, threatening, warning, consoling, comforting,—now with a few chosen disciples at his feet, again with thousands of Jerusalem's citizens hanging upon his words. Isaiah, if we estimate correctly his words and

actions in connection with his times, must be regarded as Israel's greatest orator and one not inferior to any which ancient or modern civilization has produced.

2. ISAIAH AS A STATESMAN.

It is in this line of activity, perhaps, that Isaiah reaches his greatest eminence. We may consider this portion of his work under four captions:

1. *His work in connection with Ahaz*, in which he fights the proposed alliance with Assyria. Here he stands alone. The king has evidently reached a decision to ally himself with Assyria. Isaiah opposes the alliance. He believes that such a step is at once an abandonment of principle and a danger to the state. Whatever may have been his subsequent attitude, his position at this time is clear and he employs every means within his power to defeat the plans of the king (7:1-24).

2. *His work in connection with Hezekiah*.—The situation has now changed. Alliance has been entered into with Assyria, and this alliance the Egyptian party desires to break in order that union with Egypt may be accomplished. The party which would maintain the Assyrian alliance, with which Isaiah is in sympathy, and to which Isaiah now belongs, is in the minority. The people in general are tired of Assyrian rule and it is thought that better terms can be secured from Egypt. Sermon after sermon is preached by Isaiah in favor of the continuance of the Assyrian alliance. He urges that Assyria is the rod of Jehovah, and that rebellion against Assyria is rebellion against God. In speeches and in symbolical actions he conducts his political campaign. He knew very well and described with great minuteness the fickle character of Egypt. He knew, besides, her utter weakness as compared with Assyria. He understood that it was only Judah's pride that demanded the change, and that so far as concerned the nation it was better that it should be under the Assyrian protectorate. The struggle was a bitter one. Was he wise? There is certainly no evidence to prove the contrary.

3. *His home policy*.—Isaiah as a statesman had in his mind ideals of what a state should be. Whenever he allows his mind

to go forward to the future and to rest for a time upon the Messianic kingdom, he presents his conception of a true home policy for Judah and Jerusalem. This included rulers who should perform their work in justice and righteousness, subjects who should be obedient to the rulers. It includes a relationship between man and man, and even between man and the animal world, the most ideal that has ever been presented. (See below, page 56.)

4. *His foreign policy.*—At first Isaiah believed and taught that Judah should remain independent of foreign powers, but the time soon came when this was no longer possible. He is ready then to favor the alliance with Assyria when once it has been made. His theory of Judah's independence was based upon the following considerations: Connection of Judah with another nation compelled a recognition by Judah of the gods of that nation. This would be followed immediately by the introduction of idolatry and would at the same time take away the feeling of dependence upon God. Such connection meant also luxury, debauchery, and injustice, and was entirely inconsistent with the spirit of Jehovah's city.

3. ISAIAH AS A TEACHER OF MORALITY.

The following passages are suggested as typical of the prophet's work under this head: 1:2-6, 23; 1:16, 17; 2:6-7; 3:13-15; 5:8-24; 101—4; 28:7-8. A study of these passages reveals the fact that he preached most vigorously against monopolists who joined house to house and field to field, men of wealth, short-sighted politicians, ministers of state who were guilty of nepotism and corruption, women who by their debaucheries had seduced the men from the paths of rectitude, perverters of moral distinctions, corrupt judges. He opposed Ahaz in his wilful insincerity and Hezekiah in his vacillation. He reproves the masses for their forgetfulness of God and their proneness to do the most debasing acts, and all the time he is pleading for the orphan and the widow and those who have no helper. There is no class, high or low, which he does not touch; the weakness and the wickedness of all classes is known to him.

Although he worked with nobles and kings, as perhaps did no other prophet, although he was himself of royal blood, he does not lose sight of the lower classes. He contends with kings, he pleads with the multitude. No profession, no calling is either too high or too low. All alike need his criticism, his keen rebuke; all alike, when it is needed, receive his words of comfort and encouragement. The special sins of his day, as gathered from his sermons, were idolatry, luxury, extravagance, pride, debauchery, licentiousness, soothsaying, sorcery, distrust of God and trust in armies, indifference to righteousness, injustice to the poor, the corruption of judges, the false administration of office, hypocrisy and skepticism. Against these sins he preached continuously, and we must suppose that thousands of his sermons have never come down to us. He was ready to interfere personally when his attention was called to a case of injustice. Symbolical action is used, though sparingly. By parable, enigma, proverb, quotation, irony and sarcasm, he drives home the truth given him by God to preach. Isaiah was severe, but he was not like Elijah. He was mild and genial, yet he was not like Elisha. He preached the doctrine of principle as opposed to the doctrine of expediency. He was devoted to truth at any cost, and yet he was not indisposed to accommodate himself to the situation. The fundamental principle, however, on which he made everything rest, was that of absolute reliance upon Jehovah.

4. ISAIAH AS A PREACHER OF DIVINE TRUTH.

Space may not be taken to indicate the truth which he taught in common with other prophets who preceded him. This statement must be confined strictly to a brief sketch of his peculiar teachings:

1. *His teaching concerning God.*—In Isaiah's mind the two attributes which stand in the foreground are majesty and holiness. Nowhere in history is the majesty of God more vividly described than in Isaiah's picture of Jehovah's day (2:11-20). The whole world is a reflection of the divine glory (6:3) and especially in his figures does he give evidence of his appreciation

of the manifestation of divine power; for example, 5: 16; 10: 17; 23: 11; 28: 2, 21; 29: 6. The thought which more than any other colored his preaching was suggested to him in the words which the cherubim sang, Holy, Holy, Holy. This is seen in the name which occurs so frequently in his writings, "The Holy One of Israel." Did Isaiah appreciate the love of God? Yes. But not so clearly and forcibly as did Hosea. Was his conception rather that of a God severe and just? Yes. But Isaiah's God was not so austere as was the God of Amos.

2. *His teaching concerning worship.*—Isaiah has no sympathy with formal worship (1: 10-17), or with routine ceremonial (29: 13, 14). Worship is of no value if there is not a life consistent with it. His description of the true worshiper is to be found in 33: 14-16. Was Isaiah really hostile to sacrifice and prayer, as would seem at first thought from a reading of chap. 1? It is probable that he had little or no confidence in the routine acts of worship as a means for appreciating the character of God. This worship was largely superstitious, and the mass of the people believed that the mere act of worship was sufficient to gain the favor of God. The worst sins conceivable were committed by the very priests who conducted the worship. Under these circumstances is it strange that the prophet, whose conception of God was so clear, and in whose thought the life of man must be consistent with the character of God,—is it strange, we say, that such a prophet should find frequent opportunity to condemn in no uncertain tone the mockery and hypocrisy of the religious ceremonialism which he saw on every side.

3. *His teaching concerning the remnant.*—One should read in this connection at least the following passages: 6: 13, the story of Shearjashub (7: 1-10) 4: 2; 10: 21, 22; 1: 27; 37: 31, 32. As has been pointed out so clearly by Professor Driver, the doctrine of the remnant furnishes the principle by which Isaiah reconciled God's faithfulness with his justice. To Judah great promises have been given. Of Judah a great work is to be expected. Judah, therefore, cannot be cut off; and yet how can she do the work assigned her if she is full of iniquity?

What can Jehovah do? What must he do? First of all, punish her for the sin, and purge her of her iniquity. But she may not be destroyed. She will pass through the furnace of trial, and will come out refined. The admixture of dross will be removed, and those who remain, the remnant, will be pure and holy, and thus able to accomplish the great work given the nation to do. It was a doctrine which grew out of the historical situation. Israel was wicked, therefore Israel must be punished. Israel was the chosen nation of God, therefore Israel after punishment should continue in her vocation.

4. *His teaching concerning the ideal Zion.*—The more important passages are the following: 14:32; 28:16; 29:5; 29:17-24; 30:20-26; 32:1-8; 15:18; 33:5, 6. The city of the future and ideal Zion shall be perfect. Judgment and justice shall come forth from her midst, and prosperity shall abound. Did Isaiah expect these pictures to be realized in the far distant future? If so, the prediction is still unfulfilled, and so far as man can see there is no likelihood that it will be fulfilled. Or, did he have in mind a spiritual Zion, and have these words of prophecy found fulfilment perhaps in the New Testament dispensation, the spiritual Zion? Or, again, did Isaiah really expect the predictions to be fulfilled, and did he expect the fulfilment in his own days in connection with the Assyrian invasion? Was he, perhaps, disappointed, and were the later prophets, like him, disappointed? And yet was not the prophecy at least in part fulfilled in later times in the ushering in of the Messianic kingdom?

5. *His teaching concerning the Messianic kingdom.*—It will be remembered that before this time the Davidic dynasty had occupied an important place in the thought of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah now pictures the ideal kingdom and the ideal Zion. It is important at this point to recall the prediction of Immanuel, the birth of the child, the circumstances under which the birth is to take place with the peculiar significance of the name. Still later we have the representation of the Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, the Reformer and Ruler (9:6, 7). This king is one who will be given divine equipment

(11:1-4) and he will extend the divine blessings far and wide (11:5-10); peace shall be universal.¹ Many other interesting topics might be selected, but these must suffice.

Let us sum up the case. From the *literary* point of view there is but one Old Testament writer, if one, superior to Isaiah, namely, the writer of the Book of Job. From the *political* point of view there is but one statesman in the whole range of Israel's history superior to Isaiah as a statesman, namely, Moses. From the *ethical* point of view there is but one teacher superior to Isaiah, but one group of writings superior to those of Isaiah, but one Old Testament group from which humanity has received more help, namely, the Book of Psalms. From the *theological* point of view there is but one writer who sees more clearly God's plan of salvation, who sees God himself more closely than does Isaiah, namely, the author, or authors, of the second part of Isaiah. Our subject, therefore, the Isaiah of 750-700 B. C., in round numbers, second only in each of these four aspects to one, combines all and is, everything considered, perhaps the most wonderful character of Old Testament history.

¹See article on "The Child Prophecies of Isaiah," BIBLICAL WORLD, December 1896.